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GUEST: Graça MACHEL
United Nations Secretary-General's Expert
on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children

JOURNALISTS: James Bone, *The Times* (London)
Raghida Dergham, *Al-Hayat* (London)

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CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS

Graça MACHEL, the United Nations Secretary-General's Expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, discusses different aspects of children in conflict, most especially the recent dangerous phenomenon in which children are used as soldiers. In addition to forcing them to kill, this trend deprives children of education, separates them from their families and robs them of their innocence. Recruiting child soldiers is a criminal act, and those responsible for it should be caught and punished. The media should play a major role in combating this problem. The entire United Nations system should be involved, at the highest levels, in bringing pressure to bear on governments and groups who are known to use children in conflicts to respect the human rights guaranteed by the Geneva Conventions. Ms. Machel also calls for the reassessment of sanctions that hurt children.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Over the last few years, scores of armed conflicts have raged in many parts of the world, causing tremendous material destruction and inflicting immeasurable human suffering, particularly on women and children. But one of the most disturbing trends in these conflicts is the participation of children as soldiers. Children as young as 10 years old are trained to become killers, sometimes to kill other child soldiers their own age. Why are children being used so ruthlessly? What will be the impact of this phenomenon on our societies? And what can the international community do to put an end to this frightening situation?

Our guest today, Graça Machel, the United Nations Secretary-General's Expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, is the chief author of a recently completed United Nations report on the subject. Joining me to talk with Ms. Machel are James Bone of *The Times* of London and Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London.

Ms. Machel, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

MACHEL: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame Machel, you are from Mozambique, —

MACHEL: Yes, I am.

LITTLEJOHNS: —which is no stranger to conflict. You had the wars for independence against Portugal, and subsequently you've had some internal strife between factions. How has this affected children in Mozambique?

MACHEL: Well, the effects of these very long conflicts in our society are mainly on the framework of values—I mean, children grow up in an environment where they never know exactly what peace is; their families are disrupted, communities are; they do not have opportunity to attend schools. They have—the core of values is in disturbance. And I think this is the most difficult problem to deal with. More than rebuilding infrastructures and making sure that they have a hospital, that they have a school, how do you give them a set or a code of values in which they can develop their own personality, where they have the social support networks which give them a clear indication of what are the limits of good and bad? Particularly when they themselves are involved in violence those boundaries are not found. So I believe what is more disturbing is exactly what kind of morals we are giving to these children as new generations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Were children in Mozambique employed as soldiers against the Portuguese and internally in the other conflicts?

MACHEL: No, during the colonial war we didn't have that phenomenon. It did happen exactly these last years between RENAMO and Government. RENAMO particularly used a strategy of children as soldiers, and in many cases they were not only trained but they were drugged to be able to commit the atrocities they were doing without having a specific control on themselves.

LITTLEJOHNS: What kind of atrocities, for example?

MACHEL: You know, a child would be kidnapped, trained, and then sent back to his own village and be asked.... I can tell one story. They took a young boy of 13 to his home. It was very early in the morning, and they asked him to shoot. He was trembling of course, because he knew inside were his parents and his brothers and sisters. They told him, either you do, or we kill you. So he did shoot. When the family tried then to come out, he received repeatedly instructions to shoot. So he killed his own mother, his own father, and one of his sisters. And then he was asked to set fire on the house. I spoke to this young boy and, I don't know, I'm not sure whether he will be able to recover from the trauma. So this is just one example. But in many cases this is exactly what they wanted boys to do, is to cross the boundaries of no limits, because after that he can do anything, he can do anything. And it's exactly what I'm trying to say: What do you leave behind in those young people, if they are then to respect human life, if they are to know what is the role and the importance of family, of communities, all this?

DERGHAM: Is the use of child soldiers more common to civil wars? Did you find that this is more particular to civil wars?

MACHEL: Absolutely. Absolutely. Because in this type of internal conflict, in many cases you have civilians in arms. It's not really two armies. You may have an army from the side of the Government, but other factions are civilians in arms, and they do not have the training and the discipline of an army. So it is relatively much easier, I mean, to go beyond these boundaries.

BONE: Is it a new phenomenon, the use of children as soldiers, or is it something

MACHEL: I believe so. Because, you know, we always had children as incidental victims of conflicts, of course, but this trend of instrumentalizing children, it is relatively new. But unfortunately it's also global—you find it in Africa, you find it in Asia, you find it in Latin America. The only recent conflict where you did not find children involved was Bosnia. That was the only exception from this.

DERGHAM: What explains that, Madame? How come not in Bosnia?

MACHEL: I'm not absolutely sure. Because—you know Bosnia, it's a very complex situation. I don't think we understand it very easily. But maybe it is somehow cultural; I

don't know. Maybe the families had a much more strong type of control on what was happening as family life. I don't know. I do not have certainties about it.

DERGHAM: In your report you make specific recommendations on the issue of child soldiers. Can you explain what takes priority in your recommendations, in terms of legislation and otherwise?

MACHEL: First of all, we appeal that the Optional Protocol, which is being negotiated, to raise the age from 15 to 18 should be adopted as soon as possible, so that we will have this legal instrument to which all the Member States will be bound. But we need to find ways and means of—how do you bring, for instance, the opposition organizations, which are not Member States, and how do you bind them to an international law?

BONE: That would mean that children under 18 wouldn't be allowed to become soldiers rather than under 15, as the case is now.

MACHEL: No, they wouldn't, legally. Yes, exactly. So it's—

LITTLEJOHNS: But Madame Machel, in civil war situations, where you have factions fighting, one faction against another, one faction opposing the legitimate Government, for example, the legitimate Government may respect this limit, but their opponents probably would not. How do you deal with that?

MACHEL: That's exactly what I was trying to raise, that we have to find ways and means of bringing them to respect this. And we have a good example: for instance, the SPLA in Sudan, although it is an opposition group, has accepted to respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But I think more importantly, whoever is an opposition group, he has someone who supports—you have Member States supporting them. So we have to reach those who are behind these organizations, at least to set these values, to say, yes, even if a conflict is to take place, please keep children away from this. We need also to build a very strong public opinion movement which does not make it easy for people to think that the international community is prepared to tolerate and to accept this. And because whoever is an opposition group, he wants credibility, he wants to be accepted as an alternative of government tomorrow. So he will feel this pressure. So I think we need to use the legal way, but also we need to use pressure on them so that they should respect child rights. They should even have a sense of respect for all of the instruments of human rights if they are to be accepted as an alternative of government.

BONE: James Jonah, the UN envoy to Liberia, came back and briefed the Security Council about the fighting in Liberia and told a story about how the children are being kidnapped in Liberia, fed crack cocaine, and sent out with an automatic rifle, so they don't really know what they're doing because they're so high from the cocaine. I wonder whether

part of the problem is that so many countries now have such young populations, and a lot of countries have half the people under age 15.

MACHEL: I think we just should not give them any justification. They should not be given a chance to say, well, it's because our population is young, or it's because we are short of adults. I mean, if they want to go for retired people—I mean, they should take people who can be completely responsible of what they are doing, and of course they should be called to not use not only children, but not to drug people, because of course you are killing the sense of responsibility. And I think this should be considered criminal actually, when it comes to children. How do you do that to a child?

DERGHAM: When exactly? Because you have—in your report you touched on several different issues, from child soldiers to the refugees to the sexual exploitation to land mines, sanctions, et cetera—all these effects on children. In some cases you recommended that there should be punishment, that they should be—some cases should be declared as war crimes.

MACHEL: Exactly.

DERGHAM: Which in particular?

MACHEL: In the case of rape and gender violence. As you may know, only in the case of Bosnia and Rwanda was rape considered a war crime. And we recommend that it should be extended to any situation of conflict, either as civilians or militaries who violate women as a weapon of war—they should be considered as war criminals; and then also to simplify the mechanisms of how do you prosecute them, how do you get evidence, and how do you bring them really to be punished.

BONE: I was slightly surprised, from my reading of your report it didn't seem that the Geneva Conventions on conduct in warfare actually cover the issue of child soldiers very well. Is that correct?

MACHEL: No, they do somehow. That's why in terms of international standards we don't think really we need much more international standards, there's just a few cases, such as this raising of the age, which need to be improved. But the major problem the international community is faced with is enforcement of the existing standards. They are quite adequate, but we do not have mechanisms of obliging, if I can say, of forcing Member States to respect what they have committed themselves to when they ratify it. And that is the challenge. It was very difficult for us, this study, because we would have to focus on children first, and we had a limited period of time to present our report. So I recognize there are issues we couldn't go through, but we mention them so that if the General Assembly or if the Secretary-General understands that it's important, maybe someone else

should follow with this and say, how do you do it, how do you create these mechanisms, how do you really improve the process of enforcing the instruments which are already in place.

DERGHAM: Enforcement is of course up to the parties concerned and up to a body that would judge them. However, it seems that you also think there is a role for the media and civil society.

MACHEL: Absolutely.

DERGHAM: And how do you plan somehow building that base on a global level? Media-wise and non-governmental organizations, civil society, as you call it. How do you plan to bring those forces around, and where do you start? Do you start, for example, in a place like the United States, or do you start in a place where there is a conflict, let's say Rwanda? Where is it more essential?

MACHEL: I think we need to do both. I mean, you need to do it globally and also locally, at the national level. Just to tell you, we were very fortunate that during this process we built a very good partnership with NGOs, and as you may know, NGOs do have already some specific groups which are working on child issues, and even some groups which are working with children in conflict—here in the United Nations, and in Geneva also. So what we believe—and we started already, yesterday, actually; we had a meeting of planning to see how they can implement this—is that these groups will continue to take the report and to see how they can create plans of action to implement the report.

DERGHAM: Are women more essential in this?

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Graça Machel, the UN Secretary-General's Expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children.

DERGHAM: Yes, I was asking, Madame, if you think that women have a more effective role because it's an issue of children and there is—now that men are—

MACHEL: For two reasons. They are effective for two reasons. One is that when you hit very hard on a child, you have hit the mother immediately. So they are directly interested. And of course we could not even during the process of the study separate children from women. Second is because women themselves have been victims. If you look at refugees, the majority of refugees are children and women. Displaced is exactly the same. We are talking about rape. When you have the network of health care disrupted, when you have children who do not go to school, women feel very much the burden of this. So they are directly interested. What we try to encourage during this process is that women should stop becoming only victims and become more active, pro-active, participating in processes of peace-building and even of negotiating. For instance, you do not have in many peace agreement processes women who are involved in negotiating peace processes. It is extremely important, because they can raise the issues of children and for themselves. Second, you

don't find women who are participating in decision-making bodies, particularly when it comes to conflict prevention and conflict management, and we believe that it is extremely important that we should build that balance, and it should not continue to be a kind of male issue, it should be a societal issue. And the society then, it means we have to bring all the players in.

So, but your question also was about media. We developed some efforts to have the media support the efforts of the study, but we find a difficulty is that when it comes to reporting, the media is there, but to keep persistently the issue on the agenda, to disseminate for instance child rights, that we have found very difficult. Because journalists, they used to say, well, you know, our editors are not interested in education and so forth, they're interested in how do you keep the public interested in what is going on all over the world. So I think we need to do a lot more work with media. In my understanding, media does not only inform, it really molds, if you can say, a set of values. So it's extremely important that if you insist on what is the moral vacuum we are sliding down to with this question of not respecting children, if you raise this constantly as news but also as helping to fuel what are the rights of the child which should be respected, I think the role can – the media can play a very, very important role.

BONE: One of the things that struck me in your report was your position on sanctions. Sanctions have been used increasingly by the United Nations in recent years to punish regimes who do something bad – invade another country, support terrorists, or whatever. As I understand your recommendation, you basically think that comprehensive sanctions are a bad idea because they actually have an impact on the most vulnerable people in a society – the children. And you're basically saying forget comprehensive sanctions, take the route of targeted sanctions, arms embargoes, embargoes on dictators spending their money, that kind of thing.

MACHEL: Absolutely. I think the intention of sanctions is to make pressure on those who are in political positions or those who are in military positions or whomever. But if you have comprehensive sanctions, actually you hit more dramatically the vulnerable one. I mean, you are in a situation where you don't protect children and civilians in general. So we are saying that sanctions should be always followed by a kind of assessment of what could be the impact of this on civilians and, in particular, on children, and to allow humanitarian – a selected type of humanitarian assistance to be fuelled within the country. And focus on those you want to punish, because the punishment is for the leaders, the political leaders, the military leaders, for those who are in decision-making bodies. And this many times has not been effective.

BONE: There's been a lot of debate particularly about Iraq on that particular issue because the statistics about children and malnourishment in Iraq are very dramatic. Do you find that you encounter much support for your position that comprehensive sanctions should be abandoned as too blunt an instrument of policy by the United Nations?

MACHEL: You know, the United Nations is always a big problem. But I believe that in this case the way we have put it in the report we didn't have any kind of resistance from the Member States so far. If I have to tell you frankly, I mean, the report—some people are raising some concerns about the special representative we are proposing. They feel, well, it's going to be a more bureaucratic kind of thing, it's going to drain some resources and so forth. But on the way we have raised the issue of sanctions, and apparently most people do agree.

DERGHAM: But may I take this point a little further? Because it's an issue of faith in what you're trying to do as well. Now, of course obviously you would be running into difficulties with the Governments who want the sanctions on Iraq for example to be maintained, because that is the decision of the Security Council. On the other hand, you would have people, let's say in Iraq or in the region or outside, saying, "But there is a UNICEF report that says 4500 children are dying monthly as a result of these sanctions." And where do you come on this? Some people might lose faith in your whole recommendation if you cannot tackle this immediate issue head on. Do you think you can? Are you willing to take the political chance?

MACHEL: I want to take the political chance of putting myself on the side of the children. That's the only thing I'm concerned with. I mean, I want the United Nations to do whatever they want to do against the regime in Iraq, that's correct. But I find it very difficult to accept that we will keep our eye blind exactly to the figures you are saying. Children are dying, because they have no food, they have no medicines, and so forth. And I believe—UNICEF has done that. I'm supporting the position of UNICEF, because, I mean, I love children and I feel it very difficult to stand that because of political reasons, then who would have to pay the highest price should be children. Why is it? And I think if you confront everyone with this question, we will have to say, yes, we can find mechanisms of continuing to make pressure and to punish those who are responsible for the things that are happening, but it is our responsibility to protect the innocent people.

BONE: Ms. Machel, you talked about your recommendation that there should be a special representative for children in warfare. Of course, every time there's a UN report, there's usually an associated bureaucracy, because the way you put things on the international agenda is to have a kind of institutionalized person who can raise the issue all the time. I wonder whether it might not be more appropriate to have a special rapporteur

of the Human Rights Commission. There are a number of special rapporteurs against summary executions, kind of thematic rapporteurs that report to the Human Rights Commission. Wouldn't that be the kind of appropriate —

MACHEL: That is exactly the reason why we proposed a special representative, because this is a global issue. It has to be at the level of the Secretary-General's office to fuel what we are making as recommendations to all the agencies. It has to go to UNICEF, to UNHCR, to UNDP, to DHA — all, including the Security Council. You see? They are issues we believe that the Security Council has to be concerned —

BONE: But some people might say but there's already a whole UN agency, UNICEF, devoted entirely to children.

MACHEL: That's exactly the problem, because people believe that children are UNICEF's problem, and I'm saying no, this is a global problem. All the agencies have something to do with children. Even political decisions have to take into account children. We bring the issue of children to the top of the political agenda, not as just a specialized issue. And I would like to stress here that the special representative we are talking about is not to be eternally there, it is a transitional mechanism just to help during this first period to work with agencies exactly to build a kind of institutional culture in which they have to plan to readdress the issues in their programming, integrating the recommendations we do. It can't be taking just one year or two, I don't know how much, but we are not intending to create a new bureaucrat here. If you have the example of the special representative for IDPs, for internally displaced people, he is not a bureaucrat of the UN, and he has a very small assistance of two people probably, and he keeps moving, talking to agencies, talking to Member States, visiting places, making recommendations. And what we want is this special representative to build upon the movement of mobilization —

BONE: But that sounds as though that's the kind of job that UNICEF should be doing, going around and lobbying other agencies to focus on the children.

MACHEL: But again —

BONE: Are they not doing that now?

MACHEL: Well, they are trying to do that, but again, I think I have to draw the line that, you know, one thing is one specialized agency; something different is someone who is up at the level of the Secretary-General's office and who has a kind of authority on other agencies. And this makes a rather significant difference. Yes.

DERGHAM: I want to go back, if you don't mind, to some figures which are very disturbing, and I'll borrow from your personal note here. You say that in the past decade 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict, that three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, that millions of others have been forced to witness

or even take part in horrifying acts of violence. You say that they have been targets on purpose, targeted as children in all these fields. That is rather frightening, I'd say.

MACHEL: Absolutely.

DERGHAM: Where is it—where is there a need for an immediate action in the sub-problems that you have discussed in your report? Is it child soldiers, is it the internally displaced, is it the refugees, is it the sexual exploitation? Where should one start to focus?

MACHEL: We have proposed three major areas of focus. One is exactly this, of child soldiers. And as we discussed before, we would really like to have the legal aspects and the political pressure and the public opinion pressure to make sure that we minimize this as soon as possible. Second is this question of girls and women as weapons of war, so gender violence. And third, land mines. And as you know, there is a campaign already going on, and as we are speaking here, every week at least 500 people are being injured by land mines, and the majority of them are children. And even if we agree today that land mines should be banned, we'd still have the scourge of 110 land mines which are already deployed somewhere. It would take us thousands of years to demine. So we think this is extremely important, at least to stop now, so that we will deal with the consequences of what does already exist. It's the same case with child soldiers. You know, one thing is to say it must stop; another is that you have to demobilize them, you have to give them an alternative of getting education and training so that they can self-employ themselves or get employed. So we will have to deal at least for a period of time with the consequences of what already exists. So what we are saying is that at least in this we should find ways and means of saying stop, and then how do we clean the house, if I can say, during a certain period of time. And fourthly, I would like to add another area, to expand the concept of humanitarian assistance. It's no longer to try to give food and medicines only; it is needed to understand that you have to help those people and those families and communities in what we call psychosocial recovery and social reintegration.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame Machel, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition for **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Graça Machel, the UN Secretary-General's Expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. She was interviewed by James Bone of *The Times* of London and Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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